



Restoring the American lobster, *Homarus americanus* in response to The *North Cape* Oil Spill in Block Island Sound



Background

In January of 1996 the oil barge *North Cape* grounded on the Rhode Island coast spilling more than 800 thousand gallons of fuel oil into Block Island Sound. The spill caused more than 2.9 million lobsters to wash ashore and the natural resource damage assessment estimated that a total of 9.0 million lobsters were killed from the toxic effects of the oil. After almost 4 ½ years of study and negotiation, the state and federal governments and the party responsible for the oil spill reached a settlement which requires the responsible party to restore the lobsters killed by the spill.

The Objective:

To restock 1.248 million adult female v-notched lobsters within 3-5 years. These female lobsters will produce an estimated 23 billion eggs which will yield 9.0 million lobsters to replace those killed by the spill. In addition, the released lobsters will enter the harvestable population after one to two molts when the v-notch is expected to disappear.

The Strategy:

- Purchase healthy, disease free, legal-size female lobsters from lobster dealers within the marketplace.
- V-notch them to protect them from re-harvest for one to two molts.
- Return them to the spawning population.

In June 2000, NOAA, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) and the responsible party cooperatively commenced the restoration project. Responsible party representatives are implementing the project with NOAA and DEM representatives monitoring the effort and ensuring compliance with the settlement agreement. Based on the results of pre-operational studies, loss of lobsters due to handling in the restoration process are expected to be minimal.

The Work plan:

- Female, market size lobsters are delivered by dealers to a holding facility in Point Judith, RI.
- Every lobster is inspected to ensure it is vigorous and healthy.
- Loads of about 2500 lobsters are taken to out to sea, following pre-set transects, v-notched and released within 4 hours of loading.

Criteria: Only lobsters that meet the following criteria will be accepted for v-notching:

- Only legal-sized, female lobsters harvested from Nearshore Lobster Management Area 2 shall be purchased, v-notched, and released.
- No soft-shell lobsters will be purchased.
- Lobsters with obvious, visible signs of shell disease will be excluded.
- Single culls may be included but only to the extent found in the natural population, that is, about 15%.
- Double culls (no claws) will be excluded.
- Lobsters harvested from Long Island Sound will be excluded.

The Key Factors for success are:

- Accepting only lobsters that meet our stringent criteria into the holding facility,
- Using crates and refrigerated seawater in the holding facility to minimize handling stress,
- Minimizing the holding time and on-deck transportation time by limiting lobster load size and maximizing processing crew.
- Antiseptic methods are employed to negate any contamination of bacterial infection during “V” notching.

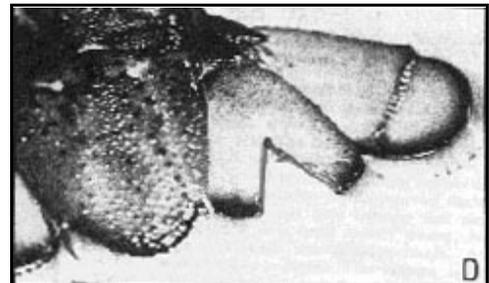
What you need to know...

Lobsters are being v-notched and released along 40 transects within a 10 mile radius of Pt. Judith, RI. We expect these lobsters to migrate throughout Block Island and Rhode Island Sounds and beyond. Keep an eye out for v-notched lobsters in your traps and return them to the sea. It is illegal to possess a v-notched lobster.

What is a “V” notch you ask?

This is a photo of a “V” notched lobster...

- A legal “V” notch is placed on the right, middle flipper,
- Is ¼ inch deep and
- Has no setal hairs.



To monitor the effectiveness of the restoration, NOAA and DEM are undertaking a tag-recapture study to document the survival rate and egg production of the restored v-notched females. Please look for further information in the near future.

For further information, please call:

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